

ARE FEMALE BIPOLAR PATIENTS OF REPRODUCTIVE AGE AWARE OF THE TERATOGENIC RISK OF SODIUM VALPROATE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY.

Authors: Dr A.U.D. Sibanyoni, Dr M. Joubert, Prof K. Naidu

Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Pretoria, South Africa

BACKGROUND

Sodium valproate is considered the most teratogenic of all anticonvulsant drugs. Internationally, new regulations require women to sign risk assessment forms if initiated on it.

AIM

The aim of the study was to explore patients' awareness of the teratogenic risk of sodium valproate.

METHODS

We conducted a qualitative study comprising 23 semi-structured interviews with female bipolar patients of reproductive age at a tertiary psychiatric hospital in South Africa.

Theme 1:

Knowledge regarding teratogenicity

- 1.1 Knew nothing at all about valproate and teratogenicity
- 1.2 Had a broad idea/s about teratogenicity
- 1.3 Had knowledge regarding teratogenicity
- 1.4 Knowledge regarding steps to follow if planning a pregnancy or if they fall pregnant while on valproate

Theme 3:

Concern about being on valproate

Subthemes:

- 3.1 Raised concern about being on valproate due to side effects experienced or concerns regarding teratogenicity
- 3.2 Believed valproate may have negatively affected previous pregnancies or plans to conceive and some were not happy about sodium valproate as the drug of choice

Theme 2:

Counselling regarding teratogenicity

Subthemes:

- 2.1 Counselling received at Weskoppies Hospital
- 2.2 Counselling received at the local clinic or other psychiatric hospitals
- 2.3 No counselling received at district level hospitals
- 2.4 Searched online for teratogenicity in valproate after deriving an interest
- 2.5 Counselling regarding contraceptives
- 2.6 Information shared during counselling

RESULTS

Patient psychoeducation and self-education is improving as many patients were aware of the risk of teratogenicity of sodium valproate either by being educated or by searching online after developing an interest. Our study identified the need for female patients to be educated about contraceptive use when starting on sodium valproate to avoid pregnancy.

Table 1: Demographic data of 23 female bipolar patients who were interviewed regarding their perceived awareness of teratogenic risks associated with using sodium valproate.

Age:	
18-25	4
26-35	13
36-45	6
Marital status (n=23)	
Married	4
In a steady relationship	14
Single	5
Number of children:	
No children	10
1 Child	8
2 Children	3
3 Children	2
Expressed intent to have more children	16
Residential area:	The area highly represented in the study was central western townships of Pretoria i.e Atteridgeville and Saulsville

CONCLUSION

Our study shows that patients are becoming more aware of the teratogenic risk of sodium valproate. This suggests that consultations focusing on issues of conception and the use of sodium valproate in women of child bearing potential has improved.

